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A Report from the 2008 Legislature

To my constituents in the **5th Legislative District**

Dear Friends and Neighbors,

I hope this newsletter finds you well and, like my family, you are looking forward to what the summer months have to offer.

The 2008 legislative session ended March 13 after 60 busy days for state lawmakers. This year included some successes in Olympia – including steps forward in education and public safety. Unfortunately, it also saw continued inaction on some of the most important issues facing families – including traffic congestion relief, health care and property tax reforms. I discuss these issues – in addition to state spending – in this newsletter.

Thank you for taking the time to review this newsletter and for providing me with your feedback. I greatly appreciate and value your views and input!

While the Legislature will not convene again until January 2009, I will be busy during the interim meeting with constituents and community groups throughout our district in an effort to better serve you. If you ever have any questions, concerns or comments, I encourage you to contact me.

In closing, thank you for allowing me to be your state representative. It continues to be an honor and privilege to serve the people of the 5th District.

Sincerely,

A blue ink handwritten signature of Jay Rodne.

Rep. Jay Rodne

Representative Jay Rodne

OUT-OF-CONTROL STATE SPENDING

\$2.5 billion budget shortfall projected

State spending has been out-of-control the last four years. While new programs and services have good intentions, they are often promises that cannot be kept without increasing taxes.

Our state spending growth rate is 16.1 percent, but our state revenue growth rate is only 7.3 percent. This budget approach is unsustainable and that is why I did not support it.



Nonpartisan legislative staff has projected a budget shortfall of \$2.5 billion next year, and this deficit could double the following budget cycle.

As a result of four years of reckless spending, my concern is there will be a move next year for significant tax increases. This is exactly what families cannot afford. Rather, I believe

the state needs to prioritize, reduce the size of its bureaucracy, and usher in sound budget and fiscal restraint.

Here are some other troubling facts about state spending:

- State spending has increased more than 33 percent – over \$8.7 billion – in the last four years.
- Over 6,000 new state employees have been added since 2004.

Property tax relief denied

If our state cannot control spending, it cannot control taxes. Despite promises made by the governor and majority party, the Legislature refused to enact any meaningful property tax relief this session.

The following property tax relief measures, which I supported, did not even receive public hearings:

- **House Bill 3353** would have eliminated the state portion of the property tax.
- **House Bill 2419** would have given homeowners who paid property taxes in 2007 a \$400 rebate check.
- **House Bill 2418** would have required voter approval to use banked property tax levy capacity.
- **House Bill 1720** would have given property tax exemptions to veterans who are disabled in the line of duty.



STRENGTHENING PUBLIC SCHOOLS

Revising the state math curriculum

I support strong academic standards, measuring student performance and ensuring our high school diploma is meaningful. This requires a commitment of resources from the state level, a thoughtful approach to curriculum and accountability for all those engaged in the education process – including students, parents, teachers, and education leaders.



I am concerned our students at all levels have not been well served by our state's math curriculum. Too many students lack a solid understanding of math fundamentals which, if left unchecked, has to be remediated at the college level.

Unfortunately, it has become clear our state's math curriculum is deficient. This year, we took important steps to address this problem by enacting two bills:

- **Senate Bill 6534** returns the responsibility for developing and adopting state math standards to the State Board of Education rather than the Office of the Superintendent of Public Instruction, where the task became bogged down in "turf wars." This measure properly realigns the focus back on our students and developing a strong state math curriculum that will set them up for success.
- **House Bill 3166** implements two high school end-of-course exams as the high school math Washington Assessment of Student Learning (WASL).

Enhancing career and technical education

I also supported a measure that will enhance career and technical education in our public schools.

- **Senate Bill 6377** will ensure high school career and technical education programs are connected to apprenticeship and certified programs. More than 175,000 students in our schools rely on these programs.

This is a critical step to ensure our students have more options as they enter a global economy and compete for jobs.



2008 Legislative Report 5th District

Leadership, decisions needed for public education funding

There is a heated debate taking place over whether the state is providing adequate funding for our K-12 public education system.

We must do more to ensure our state fully funds basic education and that is why I have supported a measure that would "Fund Education First" – before the state allocates resources to any other budget item. This proposal would require a dedicated K-12 budget be enacted and sent to the governor's desk before any other budget proviso was enacted.

"Fund Education First" would require our state to prioritize spending, which is necessary if we are to truly uphold our obligation of making our children's education the "paramount duty" of the state. Unfortunately, the majority party has refused to bring this proposal up for a vote. I find this troubling.

Part of the problem is many in Olympia would rather "study" the issue than act and work for solutions. This year, the Legislature commissioned its 19th study on the issue of K-12 financing! Due to inaction and endless studies, our children and K-12 education system will continue to suffer.

We need leadership and a commitment to action. It is time for decisions – not more studies.



Rep. Jay Rodne discusses transportation on the House floor

TRANSPORTATION UPDATE

Some progress has been made on local transportation needs, including the State Route 900 – SE 78th Street to Newport Way project, and the State Route 202 – State Route 520 to Sahalee Way widening project.

However, this year saw no meaningful progress to provide traffic congestion relief or improve safety on the two critical structures in the Puget Sound region – the 520 Bridge and Alaskan Way Viaduct.

520 Bridge

This year, the Legislature adopted a plan for the 520 Bridge replacement that I believe has little merit. Although the replacement may now be completed by 2014 (2018 was the original target date), the design offers no new general purpose capacity and will do nothing for congestion relief. The new bridge design will be limited to two general purpose lanes and one HOV lane in either direction – which is essentially what we have now.

This means the new bridge will be inadequate to meet our region's capacity needs on the first day it opens. More troubling is the fact that, under the plan, the state may begin pre-construction tolling perhaps as soon as this year. This would mean the state may also have to toll the I-90 Bridge to avoid massive congestion due to people diverting to an alternate route to avoid 520 Bridge tolls.

I joined efforts to eliminate pre-construction tolling (in favor of tolling only when the new bridge opens) and to ensure all tolling revenues would be dedicated strictly to the cost of the new project – and not to transit or other social programs. These efforts were defeated.

I supported an alternative policy that would have provided for an eight-lane bridge to meet the capacity needs of our growing region. Additionally, tolls would have been implemented at a consistent and uniform price when the new bridge was completed. Finally, any tolling revenue would have been dedicated to the cost of the new structure, and the tolls would be eliminated after the bridge was paid for completely.

Alaskan Way Viaduct

There was no significant progress made on the Alaskan Way Viaduct this year. There is still no plan to replace the structure and no consensus to move forward.

A new vision for transportation

We need to rethink the way we invest in our transportation infrastructure. Relying only on our state gas tax dollars and dedicated fees is proving to be inadequate over time.

I supported a plan that would have generated \$6 billion in new revenue without raising taxes. It would have dedicated a portion of the sales and use tax on new and used automobiles and auto parts, and sales and use tax on transportation projects, to infrastructure needs statewide.

By prioritizing, streamlining our permitting process, and utilizing creative financing tools, we can make the smart investments in a multi-modal transportation system that will reduce congestion, enhance safety and foster livable communities without relying on tax increases.

Representative Jay Rodne

STATUS QUO ON HEALTH CARE

While many good bills were introduced, no meaningful health care reform passed this year. In keeping with the approach of studying issues, the 16th health care study since 2005 was commissioned to look at the issues of costs, access and delivery.



I supported three measures that would have provided meaningful health care changes and assisted the uninsured, small businesses and self-employed, but they were not brought up for a vote:

- **House Bill 1539** would have provided access to health insurance for small employers and their employees.
- **House Bill 1638** would have provided tax incentives for employer-provided health insurance.
- **House Bill 3384** was a multi-pronged approach that would have offered affordable, flexible health insurance.

HELPING YOU

This is the final newsletter I am allowed to send you in 2008 due to election-year restrictions. I am allowed, however, to respond to constituents who contact me.

If I can ever be of assistance to you, or if you just have a comment to share, please feel free to contact me. I greatly value your feedback and always appreciate hearing from you.

ENSURING SAFE COMMUNITIES

Public safety is one of my top priorities as your state representative. As the ranking minority member on the House Judiciary Committee, I work directly on issues involving the safety of our communities.



We took some important steps forward this year in strengthening laws pertaining to sex offenders, identity thieves, criminal gang activity, and those who elude law enforcement. Despite this progress, more work remains to be done next year.

Here are some public safety highlights from this year that I supported:

- **House Bill 2713** expands a statewide sex offender/felon DNA database.
- **House Bill 2637** will help people recover from identity theft crimes.
- **House Bill 2712** will provide a statewide definition of a gang, gang member and gang crime, and create a statewide gang database. It will also provide funding for additional law enforcement resources in combating criminal gang activity.
- **House Bill 1030** will increase sentencing for someone who endangers the public while eluding a police officer.

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